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ABSTRACT

This study evaluated the leisure attitudes and recreation participation patterns of a sample of returning female college students. Interviews were conducted with 36 full-time women students who had returned to graduate school after a five-year lapse in their formal training. The women placed a high value on the cognitive and affective aspects of their recreational activities. However, the score concerning their behavioral attitudes were lower, indicating that incongruity existed between what the women thought and felt about recreation and what they did in regard to their actual activities. The greatest barriers to recreation were related to limited time, work and school being the highest priorities; and too much daily stress. The returning students said they participated less in mass media, social, outdoor, sport, and hobby activities when they returned to school. The study suggested implications for those who may be programming for women who are returning to school. With the growing number of returning students, traditional student activity and sports programs may not be the best methods for supplementing the recreational needs of this group of students. (Author/JD)

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Recreation and the Returning Female Student

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Women returning to college after an interruption in their formal education have become a common phenomenon in colleges and universities today. The purpose of this study was to evaluate the leisure attitudes and recreation participation patterns of a sample of returning female students.

The study was conducted in the fall of 1983 with a random sample of female students at the University of Wisconsin who had returned to graduate school after a five year lapse in their formal training. Personal interviews were conducted with 36 full-time women students.

The women placed a high value on the cognitive and affective aspects of their recreation activities. However, the scores concerning their behavioral attitudes were lower indicating that incongruity existed between what the women thought and felt about recreation and what they did in regard to their actual activities.

The greatest barriers to recreation were related to not enough time, work and school being the highest priorities, and too much daily stress. The returning students said they participated less in mass media, social, outdoor, sport, and hobby activities when they returned to school.

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The study suggested implications for those who may be programming for women who are returning to school. With the growing number of returning students, traditional student activity and sports programs may not be the best methods for supplementing the recreational needs of this group of students.

Recreation and the Returning Female Student

Women returning to college after an interruption in their formal education has become a common phenomenon in colleges and universities today. These women often interrupted their schooling because of marriage, of the need to support husbands completing degrees, for financial reasons, or because they were not encouraged to pursue degree completion (Levine 1976). While these same factors have influenced many of the women's leisure attitudes and pursuits prior to returning to school, little research has been conducted to determine the changes in women's leisure when they return to school. The purpose of this study was to evaluate the leisure attitudes and recreation participation patterns of a sample of returning female students.

Background

Several studies of returning women students have been conducted. The foci of these studies have been the barriers encountered by women returning to school, the reasons why they return, and other such issues. Very few of the studies have directly or indirectly addressed recreation-related issues. A study conducted by Berkove (1977) pointed out that at least half of women in her study mentioned having "time for myself" as a problem while they were in school. This concern was usually connected to the role strain encountered by the women as well as the guilt associated with putting extra responsibilities on the

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families (Douvan 1977). As a consequence, many of the women returning to school gave up some of the "extras" in their lives, such as entertaining and community events (Levine 1976).

Methodology

The situational explanation of leisure behavior was selected as the theoretical framework for this study. This framework suggests that leisure is influenced by the situation and the environment in which people find themselves. Thus, the leisure behavior of the returning women students would be influenced by the recreation facilities available to the women and the social circle of family and friends. Stover and Garvin (1982) suggested that a change in situation (i.e. returning to school) would produce a change in the leisure behaviors of the women when compared to the behaviors prior to re-entering school.

Leisure attitudes of the women were also of interest in this study. The attitude scale designed by Ragheb and Beard was modified for use (Ragheb & Beard 1982). This scale measured the three components of leisure attitudes:

Cognitive- the basic beliefs of individuals about leisure

Affective- reflects the liking/disliking of leisure activies

Behavioral- past, present, and future intended lesiure activities.

The total reliability of the scale was .94 with the three component parts having reliabilities ranging from .89 to .93.

The study was conducted in the fall of 1983 with a random sample of female students at the University of Wisconsin- Madison who had returned to graduate school after at least a five year lapse in their formal training. Personal interviews were conducted with 36 full-time students. The interview questions included general demographic charactersitics, an assessment of leisure attitudes, a listing of barriers to leisure, and an inventory of activities participated in over the past two years. Several open-ended questions related to values of leisure and changes in participation were also asked.

Findings

The demographic variables were initially analyzed to provide the general background information on this particular sample of returning women students. The women interviewed had been away from an academic setting for almost eight years. Less than half were married and one-third of the women had children. Half of them were currently employed for more than 21 hours a week. Forty-eight percent of the women had total household incomes of under $10,000. Approximately 85% of the women were happy about their decision to return to school, while the remaining 15% were ambivalent (see Table 1).

The means of the three components of leisure attitudes indicated that the women placed a high value on the cognitive and affective aspects of their recreational activities (see Table 2). The means for the cognitive and affective dimensions were 54.6

and 52 respectively, out of a possible 60 points. However, the scores concerning their behavioral attitudes were lower (mean=43.3). This lower mean indicated that incongruity existed between what the women thought and felt about recreation and what they did in regard to their actual activities. An analysis of variance of these scores and the demographic variables indicated that only marital status differed at the .05 significance level. The women who were single placed more importance on the cognitive aspect than did married women (mean= 56.1 and 52.5 respectively). Thus, women who were not married had greater knowledge about leisure and its relationship to the quality of life.

The most highly rated cognitive statements included that recreation contributed to one's health, was beneficial to individuals and society, and that they helped to renew one's energy. The affective statements which were most valued were that recreation is good for an individual, gives pleasure, and is something to be valued. The behavior statements that were rated most highly included that the women would prefer to live in an environment which provides recreation opportunities, and if given a choice would increase the amount of time spent in recreation, especially if they could afford the time and money.

The next major analysis addressed the situational theoretical suggestion that returning to school would affect the recreation participation of the women students. T-tests were used to analyze the differences in perceived participation levels in mass media recreation, social recreation activities, outdoor activities, sports, cultural activities, and hobbies of the women

before and after returning to school (see Table 3). With the exception of cultural activities, all of the areas showed significant decreases in participation. The greatest decreases came in the social, mass media, and outdoor activities. The means for mass media (watching tv, reading newspapers/magazines, and going to movies) dropped from 1-2 times per week to about twice a month. Social activities (visiting friends, dancing, parties, etc.) dropped from about two times per month to about once a month. Participation in outdoor activities went from about once a month to seldom participating at all. No differences were found to be related to the demographic variables with the exception of employment level. Women who were employed tended to socialize more than the women who were not employed for pay. It was interesting to note that for this group of women, the most frequent recreation activities while in school were reading magazines and newspapers, doing fitness activities such as swimming, running, and exercising, and watching tv.

The remaining area of concern in this study was the barriers to recreation as perceived by these returning women students. This analysis indicated that the greatest barriers to recreation related to not enough time, to work and school being the highest priorities, and too much daily stress. Several quotes from the open-ended questions illustrate the problem of reduced time for recreation, but also the importance that the women placed on taking time for their own recreation.

> Much less leisure. However, school has forced me to prioritize my leisure; therefore, it's of better quality.

I've had to plan for it more.

I'm impressed with the importance of it. I just couldn't survive without it. I was tense when I first started school; now I allow myself the time and I'm happier for it.

There is no change in the kinds of activities I do, just less time available for them.

These responses from the open-ended questions raised an additional concern for the women. While they felt that taking the time for themselves to participate in recreational activities was important, it also raised some feelings of guilt as illustrated by the following quotes.

I will occasionally deny myself "my time". However, I can't function for long periods without it.

I feel guilty about taking time for my leisure. I know leisure is important, so I try to take time.

Could always be doing something else, so feel more guilty.

Several potential barriers were not seen as deterrents to recreation by the women in this study. The women indicated that

not knowing what was available to do, not knowing what to select, not having the skills or the proper fitness levels were not inhibiting factors.

Conclusions

This study found that indeed women's recreation patterns were adversely affected by their return to academia. These findings would support Stover and Garbin's situational hypothesis of leisure that states that the environment rather than personal characteristics influence the individual's leisure behaviors. While the women's cognitive and affective dimensions of leisure were quite positive, the actual behaviors were considerably lower which indicated a discrepancy between perception and action.

Several conclusions and considerations for those professionals programming for recreation can be suggested. Since women continued to be involved in fitness-oriented activities, having facilities and organized programs accessible to them while at school would be a consideration. Returning to school did lessen the actual amount of time spent participating in activities, but the value they placed on their leisure remained high. Since past research has indicated that women feel guilty about taking time for themselves, offering family-oriented activities or providing childcare at the recreational site may be other alternatives to consider.

With the growing number of returning students, traditional student activities and sports programs may not be the best

methods for supplementing the recreational needs of this group of students. Recreation planners need to consider offering programs throughout the day, especially for fitness activities. It is clear from the women's responses that leisure is an integral aspect of their lives, and that ways to meet their leisure needs are important to consider.

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Table 1

DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS
OF WOMEN RETURNING TO SCHOOL

Time away from school	8 years
Marital status	
Married	41%
Not married	59%
Have children	33%
Employed for pay	69%
Total household income	
<$10,000	48%
>$10,000	52%

Table 2

LEISURE ATTITUDE COMPONENTS*

Cognitive	54.6
Affective	52.0
Behavioral	43.3

* 60 Total Points

Table 3

LEVELS OF RECREATION PARTICIPATION
WITH THE GREATEST DECREASES

Activity	Before	After
Social	2/month	1/month
Mass Media	1-2/wk	2/month
Outdoor	1/month	Seldom